



**EMERGENCY MEDICAL
SERVICES AGENCY**
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 26, 2013

Contact: Michael Wilson
213-240-8059
micwilson@dhs.lacounty.gov

L.A. County Conducts Disaster Healthcare Volunteer Exercise

LOS ANGELES, Calif. – State and local emergency preparedness officials today conducted a County-wide exercise of the Los Angeles County Disaster Healthcare Volunteer (DHV) program. During the exercise, over 200 volunteer doctors, nurses, mental health professionals, and other volunteers were deployed to eight health care facilities across the County. The exercise is the largest known of its kind, testing the entire range of plans and procedures for the mobilization of volunteer health professionals from their notification and call-up through to deployment into local hospitals and clinics.

The Disaster Healthcare Volunteer program is a federally funded program of pre-registered, pre-credentialed healthcare volunteers capable of working in hospitals, other clinical and public health settings in the event of disasters and health emergencies. Volunteers may be nurses, physicians, mental health professionals, or any of several dozen professions capable of supporting medical and health needs during a disaster. Volunteers may be clinically active, retired, or licensed without recent clinical experience.

The healthcare facilities participating in today's exercise were California Hospital Medical Center, Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital, Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center - San Pedro, PIH Health Hospital, Northridge Hospital Medical Center, Santa Monica - UCLA Medical Center, Venice Family Clinic, and Eisner Pediatric & Family Medical Center.

"The recent tragedy in Boston is a reminder that emergencies can happen at any time and our healthcare infrastructure may be strained for a prolonged period," said Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency director Cathy Chidester at a downtown news conference held after the exercise began. "The Disaster Healthcare Volunteer program is intended to backfill the staffing shortages that will result as health facilities deal with surges of patients."

Chidester said that when disaster strikes many healthcare professionals want to help, which is why it is important for healthcare volunteers to sign up in advance. Volunteers can be assigned to any number of duties, such as providing staffing relief at a hospital heavily impacted by an

-More-

earthquake or other disaster, or providing flu vaccines at a public health clinic. The key to a smooth response is advance registration and periodic drills and exercises, she said.

“Public and private hospitals across Los Angeles County are already operating under enormous daily pressure because of the high numbers of uninsured and the impact of several emergency room closures over the past decade,” said Roger Seaver, chief executive of Henry Mayo Newhall Memorial Hospital. “A disaster event will further burden this fragile system and volunteers are a critical component of contingency planning for any such scenario.”

“When a disaster strikes, it is vital that we have enough staff to deal with the potential influx of patients,” said Saliba H. Salo, president and chief executive of Northridge Hospital Medical Center, one of the volunteer deployment sites. “The Disaster Healthcare Volunteer Program is a crucial component in adequately preparing for these types of emergencies.”

Today’s drill practiced the complex logistics needed to respond to a wide-spread disaster such as a large earthquake. The exercise involved the entire process of deployment of Disaster Healthcare Volunteers:

- The request by participating healthcare facilities;
- The call-up of volunteers, including determining their availability, sending deployment assignments, and detailed deployment information;
- The process of receiving, checking in, and orienting volunteers to their hospital or clinic assignments;
- Volunteer orientation at each healthcare facility;
- The process of checking out volunteers and releasing them from service at the end of the day;
- The planning, coordination, and communication between the County and participating healthcare facilities, and between the volunteers and the County.

Health care volunteer Sheila MacDonell, a registered nurse and patient placement coordinator at Providence Holy Cross Hospital in Mission Hills, said a lesson learned from the Northridge quake, Katrina, and other major disasters is the need to pre-certify volunteers to prevent imposters and ensure that patients are receiving care from trained medical professionals. “Every disaster volunteer in this program is already credentialed, and licenses, certifications, and advance training are vetted before the volunteer walks in the door.”

About the Disaster Volunteer Training Program

The exercise culminated a three-year training and exercise program that is unique among counties in California. The program included a workshop, toolkit, and training materials for all hospitals throughout the County to prepare them to receive and work with Disaster Healthcare

3-3-3-3

Volunteers during emergencies. Without training for healthcare facilities, and without the Disaster Healthcare Volunteer system, it is much more complicated and time-consuming for hospitals to accept volunteers during a disaster. A customized workshop and toolkit was also developed in coordination with the Community Clinic Association of Los Angeles County (CCLAC).

Disaster Healthcare Volunteers participate in annual summits and exercises to increase readiness to deploy, and also participate in a statewide, out-of-county deployment. The L.A. County EMS Agency is responsible for developing the policies, procedures, and training programs to manage the deployment of volunteer health professionals.

How to Register

The county's Disaster Healthcare Volunteers program continues to register volunteers at www.lacountydhv.org. There are four volunteer teams in the program. The L.A. County Surge Unit is managed by the EMS Agency.

About the Los Angeles County EMS Agency

The EMS Agency is responsible for coordinating the county's emergency medical services system including hospitals, fire departments, and ambulance companies. EMS works with both the private and public sectors to bring paramedic coverage to our county's more than 10 million residents and visitors.

###